THE BOOK OF PSALMS AND THE EARLY-MODERN SONNET

Thomas Sternhold, author of *Certayne Psalmes chosen out of the Psalter of David & drawen into English metre* (1549), and through that, begetter of the monumental *Whole Book of Psalmes* (1562), certainly deserves his place among the luminaries of Anthony à Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses* (1691-2). Wood's account of him is duly flattering:

> being a most zealous reformer, and a very strict liver, [Sternhold] became so scandaliz'd at the amorous and obscene songs used in the court, that he forsooth turn'd into English metre 51 of David's *Psalms*, and caused musical notes to be set to them, thinking thereby that the courtiers would sing them instead of their sonnets, but did not, only some few excepted.'[1]

Wood's story is – not uncharacteristically – inaccurate. Sternhold wrote just thirty-seven psalms, although the confusion on that score is pardonable: the *Whole Book of Psalmes* went through over 150 editions in the reign of Elizabeth (and almost a thousand before changing patterns of worship rendered it obsolete in the early nineteenth century) and the long process by which all 150 psalms were accreted and edited means that the authors of individual texts are hard to distinguish.[2] But Wood was also wrong to imply that psalm translation was not a widespread activity among Sternhold's contemporaries: the popularity of *Certayne Psalmes* led to a rash of copycat publications with obviously derivative titles, from the posthumous printing of Thomas Wyatt's *Penitential Psalms*, opportunistically marketed as *Certayne Psalmes chosen out of the psalter of David, commonlye called the .VII. Penytentiall Psalmes* (1549), to less familiar works like John Hall's *Certayn Chapters take*[*n*] *out of the Proverbes of Salomo*[*n*] … [*and*] *Certayne Psalmes of David, translated into English Meter* (1550) and Francis Seagar's *Certayne Psalmes selected out of the Psalter of David, and drawen into Englyshe Metre* (1553).[3] The versifying of psalms was, in fact, as popular among early-modern English men, and not a few English women, as that other literary genre identified by Wood as its 'amorous and obscene' counterpart, the sonnet. Wood understood the two forms to exist in opposition to each other, and indeed, the relationship of these dominant modes of early-modern lyric poetry has not often been considered. They are, however, closely intertwined, and to read

[1] Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 2 vols (London, 1813), 1:182, col. 1.
[2] See Beth Quitslund, *The Reformation in Rhyme: Sternhold, Hopkins and the English metrical psalter, 1547-1603* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 1, for statistics concerning editions; Appendix C for an invaluable chart showing the authorship of individual psalms across eight important editions.
[3] For a full discussion of Sternhold's imitators, see Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: poetry as praise and prayer, 1535-1601* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 124-7.

psalm and sonnet in tandem affords new insights into the development of religious poetry in English.

There are contexts in which this argument might seem unlikely. While psalm-singing was a praise-worthy activity, Wood must have found in his research no shortage of sixteenth-century commentators ready, like Edward Dering in 1572, to condem the sonnet as a mode of writing 'full of all synne and abomination'.[4] Matthew Parker, in the preface to his own metrical psalm translation, published in 1561 but written some years earlier, reveals himself as another critic:

> Depart ye songes: lascivious,
> from lute, from harpe depart:
> geve place to Psalmes: most vertuous,
> and solace there your harte.
>
> Ye songes so nice: ye sonnets all,
> of lothly lovers layes:
> Ye worke mens myndes: but bitter gall,
> by phansies pevishe playes.[5]

Parker's desire to see secular texts entirely replaced with a literature of godly writing represents a significant movement in early-modern writing. His ambition was shared by both Catholic and Protestant writers. Miles Coverdale, for instance, had argued to the same end in his collection of Lutheran translations, *Goostly Psalmes and Spirituall Songes*, in 1535, and the Jesuit Robert Southwell was rallying support to the cause in the 1590s.[6] Wood aligned Sternhold with this movement, as did many later critics – most influentially, perhaps, Lily B. Campbell in *Divine Poetry and Drama in Sixteenth-Century England* (1959). In this paradigm, the amorous sonnet and holy psalm have no common ground, except via the corrective appropriations of sacred parody.

Nonetheless, the drive to obliterate secular writing and to establish in its place a vernacular library of hymns, psalms, and biblical translations represents only one strand in sixteenth-century literature, as modern critics and early-modern texts both indicate.[7] A considerable number of poets produced work in both sacred and secular genres, and many

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[4] Edward Dering, *A Briefe & Necessary Instruction* […] *requisite to be learned by hart of all suche as shall bee admitted vnto the Lordes Supper.* ([London]: [J. Awdley], 1572), sig. Aiii^{r}.
[5] Matthew Parker, *The Whole Psalter translated into English Metre, which contayneth an hundreth and fifty Psalmes. The first Quinquagene.* (London: John Day, 1561), sig. Bii^{r}.
[6] Miles Coverdale, *Goostly psalmes and spirituall songes drawen out of the holy Scripture* ([Southwark]: Johan Gough, 1535), sig. +2v; Robert Southwell, *Saint Peters Complaint, with other poemes* (London: John Wolfe, 1595), sig. A3v, and the discussion in Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 68-70.
[7] On the compatibility of protestantism and literature, see Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: grammar and grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

of those wrote psalms as well as sonnets: Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey; Thomas Wyatt; Philip Sidney; John Harington; John Davies; even Edmund Spenser, if the lost penitential psalms advertised in the printer's preface to the *Complaints* (1591) really existed.[8] If they did not, that his printer should trouble to fabricate them is a measure of how crucial the psalms were in the reckoning of any poet's achievement; that he should credit Spenser with religious translations in an advertisement for the moral, but heavily classical, sonnets and other poems in *Complaints* suggests a peaceful co-existence of real sonnets and suppositious psalms in the minds of Spenser's readers.

The interdependence of psalm and sonnet could be even more profound than the separate existence of both genres in a poet's *ouevre* might suggest. This is sonnet 35 from the *Divine Centurie of Spirituall Sonnets*, a sequence by Barnabe Barnes published in 1595:

> Arise thou mightie God of heav'n, rise up,
> Against thy sinfull foes of Babell rise:
> And scatter thou like dust thine enemies:
> Let them dregges of thine indignation suppe;
> That have beene drunken with the strumpets cuppe:
> Like smoke which vanisheth into the skies
> Dissever them, and like the waxe (which fries
> Before the fire) so melt, and burne them up.
> O magnifie the Lord, and praises sing
> Unto the mightie God of heav'n, who makes
> The clouds to thunder, and his boults doth wing
> With fire and furie: who the round world shakes:
> Before whose face Kings with their Armies flie,
> And at whose feete proud Emperours dead lie.[9]

It is a sign of the extent to which psalms and sonnets are considered incompatible that, in an otherwise excellent article about Barnes and Calvinist devotion, Anthony Earl identified lines 6-8 as a reference to Icarus flying too close to the sun. Pointing to the simile of the melting wax, he argues that Barnes 'compares the futility of the enemies of God to the plight of Icarus'.[10] It is true that Barnes was happy to introduce classical references into his sacred poetry. In this instance, however, the language of the octet is entirely biblical. Psalm 68: 1-4 reads as follows in the Geneva Bible version (1560):

> God wil arise, & his enemies shalbe scattered: thei also they hate him, shal flee before him.
> As the smoke vanisheth, so shalt ye drive them awaie: & as waxe melteth before the fyre, so shal ye wicked perish at the presence of God.

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[8] Edmund Spenser, *The Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William Oram and et al (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 224.
[9] Barnabe Barnes, *A Divine Centurie of Spirituall Sonnets* (London: John Windet, 1595).
[10] Anthony Earl, 'Late Elizabethan Devotional Poetry and Calvinism: a re-evaluation of Barnabe Barnes', *Renaissance Studies,* 11 (1997), 230.

> But the righteous shalbe glad, & reioyce before God: yea, thei shal leape for ioye.
> Sing unto God, & sing praise unto his Name: exalt him, that rideth upon the heavens, in his Name Iah, & reioyce before him.

The couplet also follows the sense of the psalm: verse 12 reads 'Kings of the armies did flee: thei did flee & she that remained in the house, devided the spoile', echoing Barnes' 'Kings with their Armies flie'. Other references in the poem are also biblical – the strumpet's cup in line 5 comes from the vision of the Whore of Babylon in Apocalypse 17.4, for instance, and identifies the nameless enemies of Ps. 68 as the Catholic Church (the Babylonian Whore of early-modern Protestant exegesis). The main body of the sonnet, however, depends entirely on the psalm. This close textual relationship is not an isolated occurence: while the individual sonnets of the *Divine Centurie* draw on the language and imagery of the psalms, the sequence presents itself as a model of the Psalter. Nor, in turn, is the *Divine Centurie* unusual in this respect: from the Henrician court onwards, the practice of sonneteering had engaged closely with the biblical Book of Psalms, and contemporary psalm translation. The rest of this essay will explore the context for the psalmic sonnets of the early modern period.

I. The Psalms and Early-Modern Poetics

Literary style had religious connotations for the sixteenth-century English writer. The early reformers had recommended plain diction to ensure that the new scriptural translations were accessible to all.[11] For certain writers, this unadorned style became associated with the veracity of their subject matter. The translators of the Geneva Bible, for instance, declared that their aim had been to restore the integrity of the text by keeping close to the original Hebrew phrases 'notwithstanding that thei may seme somewhat hard in their eares that are not wel practised and also delite in the swete sounding phrases of the holy Scriptures.'[12] The authentic sacred text, therefore, was not 'swete', and this was a distinction made elsewhere too. In his preface to a versifiction of the Acts of the Apostles (1553), Christopher Tye admired 'the pleasaunt style' of secular literature, but declared it to be inappropriate in sacred texts:

[11] See for example Campbell, *Divine Poetry and Drama*, p. 30; Miles Coverdale, *The boke of the common praier* (Worcester: 1549), sig. Aiii^{r}.
[12] *The Bible and Holy Scriptures conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament* (Geneva, 1560), sig. ***iiii^{r}.

> But he that shal, of Scripture treat
> Yf he wyl please God well:
> Of force he must, such termes forgeat
> The truth playnelye to tell.[13]

Given that sonnets were routinely praised for their sweetness and their aureate nature, it is not difficult to see why Wood might have identified Sternhold's simple diction and metrics with a biblical plain style, and why sonnets might appear to represent an incompatible, and even antagonistic, mode. Issues of style, however, were not ultimately so simple as commentators like Tye or the Geneva translators might suggest. In most cases, register depended on function. Although plain diction was recommended for texts to be used in common worship, there were also more elaborate psalm translations available: Wyatt's *Penitential Psalms* were contemporary with Sternhold's simpler hymns. John Donne's famous distinction between psalms which were 'so well attired abroad' and in the 'chambers' of England, and 'more hoarse, more harsh' in her churches, was intended as praise for the artistry of the Sidney psalms, but it also serves to highlight the presence of these two distinct traditions in psalmody.[14] Simplicity, as epitomised in the *Whole Book of Psalmes*, might be required for congregational usage, but an educated reader could return virtuously home to intricate and metrically-various psalm renderings designed for private study. Even Sternhold's translations need not be considered antipathetic to more literary works; in respect of his aim for his psalms, Beth Quitslund has made a convincing case for reading them as part of the *speculum principis* genre, rather than as a manifesto for the eradication of secular literature.[15]

For some translators, it was not just the English versions but also the original psalm texts which were unpoetic. The Geneva Prose Psalter (1559) proposes the psalms as a model for prayer, but notes that the imitator of the psalms will address God 'with stammering and stutting'.[16] Nonetheless, many of their contemporaries considered the bible to be the source of classical poetry, and a precedent (and justification) for modern versifying. Thomas Lodge's *Defence of Poetry* insists in 1579 that

> David was a poet, and that his vayne was in imitating (as S. Jerom witnesseth) Horace, Flaccus, and Pindarus; sometimes his verse runneth in an Iambus foote, anone he hath recourse to a Saphic vaine … Enquire of Cassiodorus, he will say that all the beginning of Poetrye proceedeth from the Scripture.[17]

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[13] Christopher Tye, *The Actes of the Apostles, translated into Englyshe Metre* (London, 1553), sig. Aiii[r].
[14] 'Upon the translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sidney, and the Countess of Pembroke his sister', John Donne, *Works,* ed. by John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 304.
[15] Quitslund, *Reformation in Rhyme*, 30-57.
[16] *The Boke of Psalmes* (Geneva, 1559), sig. *vii[r].
[17] Lodge, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 1, 61-86 (71).

There was some uncertainty as to the technicalities of Hebrew poetry – as Philip Sidney put it, the Psalms are 'fully written in metre, as all learned hebricians agree, although the rules be not yet fully found.'[18] However, among the Church Fathers, figures as influential as Augustine, Jerome, Origen, and Josephus, supported the notion that the texts nonethless constituted poetry; and among modern scholars, so did Franciscus Junius and Immanuel Tremellius, the influential Hebraists who produced a Latin bible to replace the (Catholic) Vulgate.[19] Their theories were readily espoused by poets, and outside the realm of the church Psalter, writers like Richard Stanihurst and Abraham Fraunce pressed classical and English metres into service to substitute for the unknown Hebrew forms.[20] Among King David's asclepiads and sapphics and heroic hexameters, the sonnet is never invoked by theologians and poets eager to find equivalents of the bible's own metres. It is not a classical form, and arrived too late on the scene to receive the imprimatur of the Church Fathers. Nonetheless, the alphabetical acrostics, the short runs of connected poems, and the lyric virtuosity of the Book of Psalms all found echoes in the early-modern sonnet sequence, with its pattern poems, coronas, and competitive displays of verbal skill. If the Book of Psalms was to be understood as a poetic compendium, the sonnet sequence was its closest early-modern counterpart.

II. The sonnet in sixteenth-century England

The arrival of the sonnet into English coincided almost exactly with the advent of the Reformation, and the new emphasis on the translation of the psalms. There had been psalms in English at least as early as the eleventh-century Paris Psalter, which included both prose and verse translation, but the ban on unlicenced translation of scripture in Arundel's Constitutions of 1409 meant that the English psalms of the 1530s represented a new development in both religious and literary terms.[21] In print, primers like that produced by John Bydell in 1534 began to include prose translations of selected psalms, and the

[18] Philip Sidney, 'An Apology for Poetry, *c.* 1583 (Printed 1595)', in G. Gregory Smith (ed.), *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1, 148-207 (158).
[19] These authors, and the topic of the metrical schema of the Bible (rather than purely the Psalms) receive perhaps their fullest treatment in James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). For Augustine and Origen in this connection, see 143-5; for Jerome, see 149-156. For an account of Renaissance thinking on biblical poetics, see Chapter 6.
[20] See Hamlin, *Psalm Culture*, chapter 3, for the quantitive movement in English-language psalmody.
[21] J. Douglas Bruce, 'The Anglo-Saxon version of the Book of Psalms commonly known as the Paris Psalter', *PMLA,* 9 (1894), 43-164 (44).

following year Coverdale's *Goostly Psalmes* included twenty-four psalms in verse.[22] Manuscript psalms are harder to arrange in chronological order, but one of the earliest is surely by John Croke (1489-1554), Master in Chancery, who created twelve verse paraphrases for an unknown courtier in the late 1530s.[23]

The first sonnet is equally equally hard to pin down, but it must be roughly contemporary with these psalms. William Sessions argues that the earliest English sonnet was the Earl of Surrey's 'When Windsor walls', which he dates to the spring or summer of 1537, when the poet was imprisoned at Windsor Castle.[24] Surrey may have been followed within a few months by Henry Parker, Lord Morley, who perhaps as early as New Year 1538 presented the Princess Mary with a manuscript containing his own translation of Johannes de Turrecremata's influential psalm commentary, *Expositio super toto Psalterio*.[25] Attached to the manuscript is a dedicatory poem which is also a translation, this time of short Latin lyric, 'Carmina de utilitate psalmorum', by Mapheus Vegus of Lodi. Morley chose a different form for his paraphrase, which he announces in the title as 'an Italion Ryme called Soneto'.[26]

Orpheus with thy musyke and all thy pryde.
And thou Mercurius do thy harpe away
And thow three fotede Apollo I do say
Sett your Armony quyte and clene asyde.
ffor dauid that the spryte of trueth tryde.
Playnge on hys harpe the swete holy lay
The mysterys of god dothe manifestly play
In shewynge us christe that on the crosse dyede
And all creatures exhorteth to commende
The hyghe god and celestiall kynge.
And made with hys worde eury thynge.
As the Iudge of us all at the latter ende.
Then let us pretende
Hys name to gloryfy hys mercy to reherse.
Whiche David harppes on in many a swete verse.
Finis.

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[22] *A Prymer in Englyshe with Certeyn Prayers & Godly Meditations, very necessary for all people that understonde not the Latyne tongue* (London: Bydell and Marshall, 1534); Miles Coverdale, *Goostly Psalmes and Spirituall Songes*. See Helen White, *The Tudor Books of Private Devotion* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), chapters IV – VIII, for a discussion of the development of the English primer.

[23] Quitslund, *Reformation in Rhyme*, 14.

[24] William Sessions, *Henry Howard, the Poet Earl of Surrey: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 131-5.

[25] The manuscript is undated, but internal evidence indicates that it must have been presented between 1538-40, or in 1543. The dating is discussed in E. Flügel, 'Verschollene Sonette', *Anglia,* 13 (1891), 72-76, and in James P. Carley, 'The Writings of Henry Parker, Lord Morley: A Bibliographical Survey', in M. Axton and J. P. Carley (eds), *'Triumphs of English': Henry Parker, Lord Morley, Translator to the Tudor Court* (London: The British Library, 2000), 27-68 (34-5).

[26] The text is reproduced in E.P. Hammond, *English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1927), 391.

Morley's sonnet is imprecise in terms of metre, and overruns the usual allowance of fourteen lines with a half-line before the couplet; however, neither of these elements would be standardised until later in the century. Despite this small variation on the typical form, it is clear that Morley knew something about the sonnet tradition – he mentions the Italian origin of the genre, and he had already translated Petrarch's *Trionfi* or *Triumphs* for Henry VIII. Since Petrarch's vernacular works were most typically presented as a pair, both in manuscript and in print, a reader of the *Triumphs* seems likely to have had access to that most important model for early-modern sonneteers, Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Although the sonnet has often been associated with love poetry, the *Canzoniere* contains poems concerned with friendship, with politics, and with religion, so it is not surprising that Morley's sonnet is not a love poem. Instead, it takes as its subject the praise of the psalms, and of the psalmist, King David himself. The association may have seemed obvious. Had Morley been asked to translate 'soneto', he would probably have come up with 'song' or 'little song'; and 'song' was also the standard English equivalent of 'psalm' – the Geneva Bible, for instance, announces the Book of Psalms as the 'psalms or songs of David'.

Sonnets often appear in association with psalm literature from this period onwards. Surrey praised Wyatt's *Penitential Psalms* in a sonnet, 'The great Macedon that out of Perse chasyd', and it is a sonnet by William Stewart which celebrates the metrical psalms in the Scottish prayer book of 1565.[27] George Gascoigne used a sonnet to introduce his translation of Ps. 130, and to relate the contents of the psalm to events in his own life.[28] Even more significantly, the first sonnet sequence in English appeared in 1560, in the form of Anne Lock's translation of Ps. 51, *Miserere Mei.*[29] Her choice of form appears to have startled some critics, who argue variously that she was unaware of the amorous connotations of the sonnet, or that she adopted it in an attempt to create a sacred parody of the love poetry in Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes* (1557).[30] However, given the existence of some sound Protestant precedents for the association of psalm and sonnet, it is at least

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[27] *The Forme of Prayers and Ministration of the Sacraments &c. used in the English Church at Geneva, approved & received by the Churche of Scotland whereunto* […] *are also added* […] *the Whole Psalmes of David in English Meter* (Edinburgh: Robert Lekprevk, 1565), sig. *4v.

[28] See the discussion of this poem in Hamlin, *Psalm Culture*, 112-118.

[29] The sonnet sequence is appended to Lock's *Sermons of John Calvin, upon the songe that Ezechias made after he had bene sicke* (London: John Day, 1560).

[30] See Michael Spiller, ' A literary 'first': the sonnet sequence of Anne Locke (1560)', *Renaissance Studies,* 11, no. 1 (1997) and Kimberly Coles, *Religion, Reformation, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 127-8.

equally possible that Lock chose her poetic form because she perceived the genres as a useful and unproblematic match.

The sixteenth-century sonnet was not confined to matters of love: the model of the *Canzoniere* encouraged sonnets praising books and friendship, sonnets involved in polemical satire, commemorative sonnets, and as Lock demonstrates, sonnets on religious themes. That the genre has been received solely as amorous is a result of editorial selection. Edward Arber did important work in the nineteenth century, making early-modern texts available to a general readership; however, his reprinting of fifteen Elizabethan sequences, dispersed throughout *An English Garner* (1877-90), depicted an English sonnet concerned wholly with matters of the heart. (It is unrepresentative in other respects too: across eight volumes, Arber fails to include any psalm literature.) Sidney Lee's influential *Life of Shakespeare* (1898) discussed romantic sonnets by Shakespeare and his contemporaries over four chapters and a substantial appendix, but only gives two paragraphs to listing sequences on other themes.[31] This established a reading of Elizbethan sonnets which dominated scholarship for almost a hundred years, but the misreadings may have begun well before Arber and Lee. Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes* is an important source for early-modern English lyric, and for sonnets in particular – it contains more than fifty examples of the form. Many of them were originally written on themes other than love, but Tottel's imposition of editorial titles tends to skew interpretations of the texts. For instance, Wyatt's translation of *Canzoniere* 269, Petrarch's elegy for his friend and patron Giovanni Colonna, is almost certainly a lament for the death of Thomas Cromwell. In Tottel's hands is reinscribed as a love poem under the title of 'the lover laments the death of his love'.

Tottel was undoubtedly important – the miscellany went through ten editions in the sixteenth century – but he was far from the ultimate authority on the early-modern sonnet. As Amanda Holton and Tom MacFaul have noted, the collection is dominated by Petrarch and his *Canzoniere*: '[m]any of the poems in the *Miscellany* are in fact close translations of Petrarch's poems, but even where textual relationships are less close, the love-poems in Tottel are characterized by behavioural and linguistic conventions which can be identified with Petrarchism.'[32] However, just as early-modern readers knew their psalms in multiple versions across a range of languages, they knew their Petrarch, not only via translations of his sonnets and other writings, but from the original texts. In these, they

[31] Sidney Lee, *A Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Macmillan, 1898). See chapters vii-x; Appendix ix; and a paragraph on 440-1 which lists some of the religious sonnet sequences of the 1590s.
[32] A. Holton and T. MacFaul (eds), *Tottel's Miscellany* (London, 2011), xiii.

would have discovered those sonnets which dealt with subjects beyond love poetry; and they would have seen the poet's engagement with the Book of Psalms.

Petrarch's writings were widely available in private collections, in colleges and schools, even in parish libraries, and we know they were read by sixteenth-century writers. Ben Jonson's copy of the 1581 *Opera Omnia* survives in the Folger, and he also owned the Gesualdo edition of the vernacular works, first published in 1533. George Gascoigne and Philip Sidney also appear to have used Gesualdo; Thomas Watson, author of the 1582 sonnet sequence *Hekatompathia*, used the Vellutello edition (1525); Spenser seems to have had access to Fausto da Longiano's text (1532).[33] These poets encountered Petrarch framed by commentary and editorial notes which pointed them to the religious motifs in his work – his repentance of his earthly love, his calls for Church reform, and his debt to the psalms. The most common edition of Petrarch in English libraries is the much-reprinted version by Alessandro Vellutello. His commentary was extremely influential, especially in foregrounding the story of Laura, whose (spurious) biography precedes the sonnet text. However, he also had a strong tendency to see parallels between Petrarch's poems, and the psalms: typical annotations on the sonnets include 'Imitando il Propheta nel Psalmo' (imitating the prophet in that psalm) or more specifically, 'Imitando il Propheta nel Psalmo Exaudi me domine'.[34]

Petrarch's involvement with the psalms went further than citation. Readers of his Latin works knew his *Bucolicum Carmen*, and would have seen his praise of the lyric qualities of the psalms in Eclogue I.55, where David appears in his youthful role of shepherd. Petrarch was one of the authorities to assert that the psalms were poetry: 'I should be guilty of no inaccuracy or impropriety if I ventured to style their author the Christian's poet'.[35] And he was a writer, as well as a reader, of psalms. The seven *Psalmi penitentiales* [penitential psalms] which appear in the *Opera Omnia* are not the biblical psalms of that name, but are original compositions in the psalmic style. They circulated widely, beyond the *Opera Omnia* and beyond individual editions of his separate works. They were included in editions of Ludolph of Saxony's popular psalm commentary (1542), and were clearly considered

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[33] See Christopher Martin, 'Retrieving Jonson's Petrarch', *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 45 (1994), 89-92; William Kennedy, '"Les langues des hommes sont pleines de tromperies": Shakespeare, French Poetry, and Alien Tongues', in Z. Lesser and B. Scott Robinson (eds), *Textual Conversations in the Renaissance: Ethics, Authors, Technologies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 91-112 (101).

[34] *Le volgari opere del Petrarcha*, ed. Alessandro Vellutello (Venice, 1525), sigs. L3^{r}, I3^{v}.

[35] Cited in Israel Baroway, 'The Bible as Poetry in the English Renaissance: An Introduction', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 33 (1933), 447-80 (451).

attractive by the publisher who flagged their presence on the title page.[36] Their significance in respect of early-modern writing is two-fold. They provided a precedent for a form of poetic composition associated with the biblical psalms, but with claims to originality – a model widely adopted, for example by Thomas Smith in his *Certaigne Psalmes* (1549) and by Richard Beard in *A Godly Psalme of Mary Queene* (1553).[37] Petrarch's text also established further connections between the genres of psalm and sonnet, since the images which were associated with the *Canzoniere*, and which provided recurrent motifs for the English petrarchans – the ship at sea, the lover's tears, the sleepless nights – also appear in his psalms.

Petrarch's association with religious writing made him a respectable model for early-modern poets. For Protestants, the Babylon Sonnets – three poems from the *Canzoniere* which criticised the late-medieval exile of the popes from Rome – were enough to see him adopted as a proto-Protestant authority;[38] for Catholics, the resolution of his sonnet sequence in a hymn to the Blessed Virgin was a guarantee of propriety. Either way, the *Canzoniere* was the source for a considerable number of sequences on religious themes. Henry Constable wrote the courtly *Diana* at the Elizabethan court in the 1580s, but followed it after his conversion to Catholicism with his *Spirituall Sonnettes to the Honour of God and Hys Sayntes* in 1594. Barnabe Barnes published *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* on the model of *Astrophil and Stella* in 1593, but followed two years later, as we have seen, with his *Divine Centurie of Spirituall Sonnets*. Others, like Henry Lok, refer to having written earlier, secular poems, but these do not survive: in their place, we have his *Sundry Christian Passions Contained in Two Hundred Sonnets* (1593) and a further hundred sonnets which appear as an appendix to his *Ecclesiastes* (1597). William Alabaster and Tobie Matthew, also converts to Catholicism, left manuscript sequences dating respectively to around 1597 and 1608. The vogue for the amorous sonnet sequence petered out with the turn of the century, but religious sequences continued to appear: Nicholas Breton's *The Soules Harmony* (1602); William Drummond's *Flowres of Sion* (1623); and I.B.'s *Virginalia, or Spirituall sonnets* (1632) are only a few examples. Many of these sequences are profoundly engaged with the Book of Psalms; any cultural objections to the sonnet form were outweighed, at least for these writers, by the resonances they found between psalm and sonnet.

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[36] Ludolphus [of Saxony], *In Psalterium Davidis Enarratio* (Lugdunum [Lyons], 1542).
[37] For Smith, see BL Royal MS 17 A XVII, and the discussions in Zim, *English Metrical Psalms*, pp. 74-9 and Ruth Ahnert, *The Rise of Prison Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2013), chapter 2, esp. pp. 65-68.
[38] See Deirdre Serjeantson, 'Milton and the Tradition of Protestant Petrarchism', *Review of English Studies*, 65 (2014), 831-52.

III. KING DAVID THE SONNETEER

Early-modern theologians were aware that the biblical king was not the sole author of the Book of Psalms; nonetheless, his was the name associated with the work as a whole. The psalms took on a narrative coherence from the events of David's life as recorded in the Book of Kings. The love affair with Bathsheba, the murder of her husband, and David's subsequent regrets for his actions, formed a frame-tale for the seven Penitential Psalms – but these were so popular that they flavoured the reading of the rest of the text. The effect was to foreground David in his role of lover. The Penitential Psalms appeared as a separate group in medieval books of hours and early-modern primers, where they frequently appear with an illustration of Bathsheba bathing while David watches her from a tower.[39] This tradition survived into the Reformation: Miles Coverdale's *The Psalter or Boke of Psalmes Both in Latyn and Englyshe* (1540) features a bare-breasted Bathsheba in the frontispiece, standing up in her bath and cheerfully accepting a love letter from David's servant. It is the only illustration in the book, and shapes the reader's interpretation of the text around this particular narrative.

David was, in the most literal of terms, adopted as a petrarchan lover. As noted above, most sixteenth-century editions of the *Canzoniere* was included Petrarch's other vernacular work, the *Triumphs*. These were thematically linked to the sonnets, and share some of their cast of characters. Laura appears again, for instance – but so, among the prisoners of Cupid in the *Triumph of Love*, does the psalmist:

> After loke howe love cruell and evyll
> Overcame Davide and made hym to kyll
> His faythfull servaunt which he repented sore
> In a derke place he dyd repentaunce therefore[40]

The *Triumphs* were a popular subject for visual depiction from the fifteenth century onwards: they were painted on majolica ware, enacted at court masques, and worked into tapestries, including a set displayed at Hampton Court. The *Triumph of Love* was the most frequently represented of the poems, and even the uneducated onlooker could have picked out from Cupid's train the figure of David with his emblems of crown and harp.

This petrarchan precedent may have inspired the use of David by sixteenth-century writers. Gascoigne, for instance, wrote a set of three sonnets between lovers who call each

[39] See for example the Sarum primers of 1533 (STC 1730.03), sig. i3^{v}; 1533 (STC 15981a), sig. Diii^{r}; 1554 (STC 2191.04), sig. Jiiii^{r}.
[40] Henry Parker, Lord Morley, *The Tryumphes of Fraunces Petrarcke* (London: John Cawood, 1555), sig. D1^{v}.

other David and Bathsheba, tracing in that relationship the mirror of their own. When George Peele brought the biblical story to the stage in a play published in 1599, the language of biblical love poetry ('Now comes my louer tripping like the Roe' (Bii^{v}), with its echoes of Canticles) is mingled with the oxymorons and motifs of petrarchism – icy fires, beauty that wounds like Cupid's arrow, and so on:

> Hot sunne, coole fire, temperd with sweet aire …
> Let not my beauties fire,
> Enflame vnstaied desire,
> Nor pierce any bright eye,
> That wandreth lightly. (Bi^{v})[41]

These congruencies of image and subject matter draw the early-modern psalm and sonnet close together. In particular, the figure of David is the key to the Protestant sequences. Catholic poets used their sonnets to explore psalmic motifs like exile and loss, but the Book of Psalms contended in their works with a wide range of textual sources: hagiographies, patristic writings, other biblical books. Protestant sequences, on the other hand, engaged more closely and more exclusively with the psalms, from which they drew both language and themes. David, at once lover and priest, sinner and prophet, straddled the generic conventions governing both psalm and sonnet, and made possible the fusion of the two forms in the shape of the religious sonnet sequence. The remainder of this essay will consider the working out of these conventions in two Protestant sequences of the 1590s, written at the height of the fashion for the sonnet form: Barnabe Barnes' *Divine Centurie* (1595) and Henry Lok's *Sundry Christian Passions* (1593) with its continuation, *Affectionate Sonets of a Feeling Conscience* (1597).[42]

The person of David, and the story of his life, gave coherence and sincerity to the disparate poems of the Book of Psalms. Sonnet sequences, similarly, take their narrative unity and authenticity from the device of the first-person speaker behind the poems. The religious sonneteers availed of both traditions when they emphasised the autobiographical nature of their work. Barnes introduced his sonnets as 'an hundreth Quatorzaines […] wherin, if through secret, and inseperable combat betwixt earth and my spirite, the privie motions, and sting of divers wounds, as they did succeede and grieue my soule, manifested appeare' (A3^{r}). They were suggested by real events in his life: they were written upon 'especiall occasions and in earnest true motions of the spirite' (A3^{v}). Lok made similar

[41] George Peele, *The Love of King David and Fair Bersabe* (London: Adam Islip, 1599)
[42] Henry Lok, *Sundry Christian Passions Contained in Two Hundred Sonnets. Divided into Two Equall Parts: The first consisting chiefly of Meditations, Humilations, and Praiers. The second of Comfort, Joy, and Thanksgiving.* (London: Richard Field, 1593); *Ecclesiastes, whereunto are annexed Sundrie Sonets of Christian Passions heretofore printed, and now corrected and augmented, with other Affectionate Sonets of a Feeling Conscience of the same authors.* (London: Richard Field, 1597).

claims. '[T]hese abrupt passions of my passed afflictions [are] witnesses of the impedime*n*ts most stopping me in my Christian pilgrimage' (A5^{r}). This stress on their sincerity is an interesting ploy, because the sonnets are simultaneously impersonal: Barnes often adopted biblical language and tropes, and Lok's speakers tend to reveal themselves as biblical personae – David, but also Jonah, Mary Magdalen, Lazarus, and many more, transpire to lurk behind his first-person pronouns.

By oscillating between the personal and the generally-applicable, Lok and Barnes capitalised on the conventions of the sonnet sequence, which purported to set autobiographical and intimate revelation at the disposal of other lovers, to comfort them in their own sufferings. But this also chimed with contemporary theories about how to use the Psalter. When Lok suggested that his personal sufferings and their solutions as expressed in sonnets 'be not altogither unprofitable for others to imitate' (A5^{r}) he referred to a long tradition of sonnet sequences, but he also echoed contemporary works on the psalms. The Book of Psalms was thought of as the pattern for prayer, and David, as the authority who provided words from his experience to fit all occasions – there were popular tables which matched circumstance to psalm text.[43] In his introduction to Beza's *Psalmes of David* (1580), Anthony Gilby remarked that the psalms 'teach us, what we shal saie unto god'.[44] The Geneva Prose Psalter recommended that, since we are unable to 'frame our prayers as we wolde' we should 'according to these examples … sigh and sob unto God.'[45] Lok's sonnets, therefore, were also being presented as an equivalent prayer book, providing a form of words to help the reader recognise and express his emotions.

If David was a lover, he was crucially – like the sonneteer – also a poet, and his sixteenth-century imitators were anxious to assert the poetic quality of their own works. Barnes identifies himself with David most explicitly at the central point of his sequence. In Sonnet 49, he repents of sexual sin, spurning his 'feeble flesh (surcharg'de with guilt)', because 'I with David would not die but live'. The first line of Sonnet 50 repeats this line, but turns it to a bid for poetic achievement which draws its strength from the model of David which he has just invoked:

> I would not die but live (deare living Lord)
> And to thy glory shew that facultie,
> With which thou didst mee worthlesse beautifie
> Turning my Muse to that Divine concord…

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[43] See for example 'Of the use and vertue of the Psalmes by Athanasius' in Parker, *The Whole Psalter* , sig. C11^{v}.
[44] Anthony Gilby, *The Psalmes of David truely opened and explaned by paraphrasis* (London: John Harison and Henrie Middleton, 1580), sig. ¶.iiii^{r}.
[45] *The Boke of Psalmes* (Geneva: Rouland Hall, 1559), sig. *vii^{r}.

> In endlesse praise of thy Divinitie…

Barnes' claim for his poetic 'facultie' is a definitive rebuttal to any lingering impression of Protestantism's lack of interest in literary attainment.

It was generally accepted that David's poetry was the product of divine inspiration, dictated by God. Lok and Barnes ventured to claim some measure of this inspiration for themselves. Both speak of the 'confused placing' (Lok A5^{v}) of their poems, but say that they made no effort to arrange them: Lok explains that he left them as 'they were by God ministred to my minde' and in this form expects them to affect their readers favourably: 'so I suppose my providence could not by a formall placing of them, so soone hit the affections of everie Reader as [might] Gods direction (by that which men call chaunce)' (A5^{v}). Their sonnets, they imply, have God's authority, and like the psalms, contain meaning beyond their authors' scope. Lok provides a sidelight onto this thinking in a dedicatory sonnet he attached to a series of psalm translations by his cousin, Michael Cosworth. If they took to writing religious poetry, he says, 'Like thyself might all men prophets be.'[46] If David was a prophet as well as a poet, the sixteenth-century religious sonneteer seems to have been making a bid for his poetry to be considered as prophecy. The sonnet sequences, in other words, aspire to the condition of the Psalter.

Several collections of sacred verse in the next century have been compared to the Book of Psalms. Rivkah Zim has noted that

> [s]eventeenth-century poets not only wrote new psalm paraphrases in the various forms of devotional lyric poetry but also wrote new religious lyrics influenced by that concept of the psalm as the most excellent form of poetry expressed by Sidney in *The Defence of Poesie*. Drayton's *Harmonie of the Church*, Herbert's *Temple* and Traherne's *Thanksgivings*, for example, may thus be described as 'other psalmes'.[47]

That *The Temple* (1633) functions as a new Book of Psalms has been widely recognised by modern critics: Barbara Lewalski refers to it as 'a New Covenant psalter, the song-book of the new temple in the heart, with [Herbert] as a Christian David';[48] Peter Hawkins calls it 'a seventeenth-century Psalter in its own right'.[49] It also seems likely that his contemporaries received them in the same way. Ramie Targoff has discussed the implications of the presentation of Herbert's book – the duodecimo format of *The Temple* was not the characteristic quarto of single-author collections of poetry in the seventeenth century, but

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[46] British Library Harleian MS 6906, sig. 2^{v}.

[47] Zim, *English Metrical Psalms*, 210.

[48] Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, 1979), 246. Her reference is specifically to the poems in 'The Church'; that is, the 162 lyrics which form the main section of *The Temple*.

[49] Peter S. Hawkins, 'The Psalms in Poetry', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 99-111 (102).

the format of the Book of Common Prayer and of cheap psalters. Its use by Cambridge University Press in printing *The Temple* suggests that the book was not perceived in terms of the lyric poetry it contained, but was considered to have a function, like the psalms, somewhere between private prayer and public liturgy.[50] There is only one psalm translation among the poems – it is, rather, Herbert's constant reference to the biblical psalms, and his free lyric re-imaging of their themes for the purpose of prayer, which have prompted these observations. And yet he was not the first to attempt a collection which would fuse devotional and lyrical aspects of the Psalter: although Lewalski and others have read this development in a seventeenth-century context, it was, nonetheless, anticipated by the Elizabethan sonneteers – Barnes, Lok, Anne Lock, and others.

For all of their similarities, however, psalms and sonnets were not an inevitable match. The qualities of poetic creativity and religious assertion were available beyond the sonnet sequences, and certain aspects of the Book of Psalms were closer to other early-modern models – its lyric variety, for instance, is better demonstrated by the Sidney Psalms. There was, however, a quality of the sonnet which made it a particularly rich choice for the early-modern poet. The genre system, as Rosalie Colie put it, 'offers a set of interpretations, of 'frames' or 'fixes' on the world'.[51] In this context, the sonnet's connotations of interiority and self-scrutiny made it an aposite choice as a vehicle for psalmody. The psalms were read in the sixteenth century as an anatomy of the soul. In prayer, they were used to encourage self-scrutiny. Calvin expounded on the theme in the discussion of the psalms in his *Institutes*, as translated in 1571:

> a man shalnot find any affection in himselfe, whereof the Image appeareth not in this glasse. … [I]n this booke, the Prophets themselves talking with God, bycause they discover all the inner thoughtes, do call or drawe every one of us to the peculiar examination of himself, so as no whit of all the infirmities to which we are subject … may be hidden.[52]

Very similar language is to be found in Robert Fills' *Godly prayers and meditations*, published the following year.

> The Psalmes and Prayers doe conteine and expresse … the Anatomie of the Soule, laid open before God eyther in sorowe, vexation, trouble, perfection or joy, and it is impossible to feele any maner of temptation, but herein we shall finde an example, and also a remedie ready prepared. The psalmes and

[50] Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 117.
[51] Rosalie L. Colie, *The Resources of Kind; Genre-Theory in the Renaissance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1973), p. 4. See also Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, and Ben Burton, eds., *The Work of Form: Poetics and Materiality in Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[52] Jean Calvin, *Commentaries on the Psalms*, trans. by Arthur Golding (London: 1571). sig *6^{v}.

> prayers well meditated driveth use to enter into our selves, and to examine those things which lie hidden within us…'[53]

But introspection is also a quality of the petrarchan sonnet. The shape of the poem encourages analysis rather than narration: the octave establishes a problem, and the sextet allows scope for probing. It is the case that the asymetry of the form means that the odds in argument are not fairly stacked – eight lines to six, or three quatrains to a single summarising couplet – so the problem rarely has space to be adequately resolved. *Astrophil and Stella* 5 is typical in its analytical qualities and its ultimate irresolution:

> It is most true, that eyes are formed to serve
> The inward light, and that the heavenly part
> Ought to be king, from whose rules who do swerve,
> Rebels to Nature, strive for their own smart….
> True, that true Beauty Virtue is indeed,
> Whereof this beauty can be but a shade,
> Which elements with mortal mixture breed;
> True, that on earth we are but pilgrims made,
> And should in soul up to our country move:
> True, and yet true that I must Stella love.

The self-awareness on display here is also visible in the religious sonnets, as Lok's shows of conflict demonstrate: 'I marvell much sometimes to see my will /Contraried by my self with harts consent' (3.viii), or 'One thing I say, an other thing I do, /One show of worke I have, an other deed: / I runne cleane from the marke I looke unto /With one hand quench the fire, with'other feed.' (3.vi).

If *Astrophil and Stella* 5 exemplifies sonneteering at its most introspective, it was also a poem seized on by Mary Sidney for its psalmic potential: her translation of Ps. 73, 'It is most true that god to Israell' is a reworking of her brother's sonnet. The overlapping quality of psychological anatomising drew the two genres together. Lok's introduction to his sequence describes the sort of self-scrutiny recommended in the psalm commentaries above, but the description is also authentically petrarchan. In his sonnets, he said,

> (as in a glasse) may be seene, the state of a renegerate soule, sicke with sinne, sometimes … shiuering with cold despaire, straight waies inflamed with feruencie of faith and hope.[54]

The shivering and burning is a standard device for the description of desperate lovers, but the oxymoron – the figure of conflict – which lends such realism to the effects of love as described in the sonnet, also sits well with the self-scrutiny of the psalm. Few early-modern protestants, grappling with the question of their own election, can have surveyed their own

[53] Robert Fills, *Godly prayers and meditations* (London: W. Seres, 1572). sig A4^{v}.
[54] Lok, *Sundry Christian Passions*, sig. A5^{r}.

spiritual states with equanimity, and the anxious sonnet-lover was an apt emblem for their uncertainties.

Lok reserved his doubts for his sonnets. His translation of the Book of Ecclesiastes, published in the same 1597 volume as the extracts above, strove for a different effect. He used a regular ababcc stanza to frame a text full of confident wisdom and proverbial assurances:

> And shalle according to the proverbe say,
> That that is onely good, and doth excell,
> Which doth begin, and also endeth well. (II.5.122-124)

or,

> In measure is (we say) a merry meane. (l.249)

or,

> Few words (if fervent) will to heaven ascend,
> He knowes our thoughts ere hart to pray we bend. (II.5.13-14)

Lok's sense of form was subtle. For him, the sonnet came with inalienable associations: love, praise, repentance, but also introspection, contradiction, and struggle. He matched the confidence of Ecclesiastes to a confident form; the emotional turmoil of the Book of Psalms he chose to map instead on to the petrarchan sequence.

Barbara Lewalski has discussed early-modern efforts to categorise biblical books under generic headings for ease of understanding and translation. Proverbs were adages; Ecclesiastes was a sermon; Canticles were an allegorical song.[55] It is clear from the vast range of translations and imitations which survive that sonnets were not the only option for the English psalmists. However, if they were not a mode which allowed for the most transparent or accurate translation, they offered to writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a form in which could be uniquely conveyed the experience of the amorous, prophetic, lyrical and personal voice of David the psalmist.

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[55] Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, 56-7.